

Interview with ESTHER SCHKURMAN  
RG-50.569\*0032  
Tape 1, Side A  
GERMAN

In this interview conducted by Peter Wortsman, Esther Schkurman, a survivor of Polish origin, talks about life in a ghetto in occupied Poland, and the deportation, daily life, forced labor, and resistance in Auschwitz-Birkenau, focusing on specific incidents which demonstrate certain killing and humiliation methods by the SS. Furthermore, Schkurman mentions several people by name who were involved in the resistance in Auschwitz-Birkenau.

**000 – 139**

Life in the ghetto

She was born in Grodno, in 1923 and lived in Warsaw by 1939; after the German invasion she returned to Grodno, and was sent to a ghetto together with her family then; she describes life in complete isolation, the confiscation of personal assets, and the killings in the ghetto; she remembers one specific incident where the Jews were chased together on the market place and had to shovel the snow using teaspoons; her father was killed when she was 16 or 17 years old; they had to lie about her father's death to be able to bury him in the cemetery; she mentions fate of her family and work in the ghetto; Remembers another incident where she was sent with her sister-in-law to a village to kill all the flies in 10 minutes; they were beaten there; describes smuggling of food, suicides in the ghetto, and different ways of humiliation by the Germans, like forcing them to sing Jewish songs.

**140 – 179**

Deportation

She was urged by her mother to survive; they were transported in cattle cars; little food, no water; many killings during the stops; she mentions Majdanek; prayers; attempts to jump from the cars.

**180 – 219**

## Auschwitz-Birkenau

Describes arrival in the camp in the night, selection, and confiscation of personal assets; shaving, tattooing, and distribution of shoes; diseases; first dead people.

### 220 – 580

Life, labor, and resistance in the camp

They had to carry stones; were told that their mothers and children come out of the chimneys; she mentions the first contacts with the men's camp, and people like **Casanova, David Schmulevsky, and Mala Zimetbaum** from Brussels (who was killed by the Nazis); she describes "heroism" in Auschwitz; explains her work in the Krankenbau (camp hospital) where she worked in the "Diätküche" (diet kitchen); mentions the name **Anna Blumaier**; analyzes the morbid killing and selection methods of certain guards, and remembers some specific incidents; she talks about her experiences with Mengele and his experiments; mentions the barrack "Kanada" where conditions were much better; she spent some time there, and could therefore smuggle food; she describes a specific smuggling mission in which she was involved.

### Tape 1, Side B

### 000 – 100

Resistance

She talks about the women in Birkenau; talks about an uprising in Birkenau which was organized by men; she mentions her friend **Eva Feldenkreis**, and specific killing incidents performed by the Sonderkommando (special unit); mentions a specific incident with **Peter Mischon** of the resistance; describes how they exchanged food in their toilet facilities and communicated through the sewage system; remembers the fate of her friend Mala who tried to commit suicide and was shot.

### 101 – 132

She mentions a couple of people and friends of hers in Bratislava; mentions names like **Walter or Rudi Zolba**; talks about arrangements for next interviews.